

Hamilton Field, Post Exchange No. 9

(Facility No. 437)

Escolta Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets

Novato

Marin County

California

HABS No. CA-2398-W

HABS

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21-NOVA,

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HAMILTON FIELD
Post Exchange No. 9
(Facility No. 437)

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Location: Hamilton Army Air Field
Novato, Marin County, California
Post Exchange No. 9
Facility No. 437 (Escolta Avenue between 5th and 6th streets)

U.S.G.S.: Novato, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1954 (revised 1980)
Petaluma Point, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1959 (revised 1980)
UTM Coordinates: Zone 10; A: 542100/4213620; B: 544720/4212220;
C: 542760/4210650; D: 541040/4212600

Present Owner: General Services Administration, Washington, D.C.

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance:

Built in 1942 during the war, the Post Exchange No. 9 is significant as an example of one of the few buildings constructed during this time with any architectural detailing. It is representative of the expansion of all facilities during the war to meet the needs of the base population.

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) for a comprehensive Statement of Significance and individual report HABS No. CA-2398-F for a condensed general Statement of Significance.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of Erection:** Construction on the PX facility occurred in 1942 (Hamilton Facility Cards 1933-1971). It was constructed during an extensive building phase on base in response to World War II.
2. **Architect:** The PX was completed at Hamilton Field by staff Army Corps architects during World War II.
3. **Original Owner:** Hamilton Field is on land originally owned by private individuals and companies. In 1930, the California Packing Company sold 630 acres of land to Marin County to use to entice the Army to build on the site. An additional 161 acres were purchased from Dr. T. Peter and Julia Bodkin. These parcels were combined with other County-owned land, and in 1932 Marin County sold a 927-acre parcel of land to the Department of the Army for \$1.00 for use by the Army Air Corps as an air field. In 1947 Hamilton Air Field was transferred to the newly-formed U. S. Air Force and renamed Hamilton Air Force Base. In 1974 the U. S. Congress declared the installation excess to military needs and closed the base (Maniery et al. 1993). The administrative area was transferred to the General Services Administration in 1974 and is currently being sold as excess property.
4. **Builder, Contractor, Supplier:** The builder is unknown, but may have been personnel attached to the Army Corps of Engineers division.
5. **Original Plans and Construction:** Plans of the PX are on file at the National Archives, Pacific Division, San Bruno, CA. and the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.
6. **Alterations/Additions:** Alterations to the Post Exchange consisted largely of reconstruction after settling caused damage to the entrance and patio. In 1958 an automatic sprinkler system was added. In 1960, a 34-foot 2-inch by 46-foot 11-inch addition was built on the northwest side of the original post exchange building. In 1965 the cafeteria was renovated and a dropped ceiling installed.

B. Historical Context:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) and Section B in report HABS No. CA-2398-F.

Built in 1942 in the administrative heart of base, the PX served the 1,000s of men housed in temporary buildings in this area during the war. Facilities included a clothing store, barber shop, store, cafeteria, and a tailor shop. By the 1960s this building was the main post exchange for the base, a role it maintained until the 1974 base closure.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural Character:** The PX, although not built until 1942, was based on an earlier design for an exchange and is stylistically compatible with the original base construction. The buildings are reinforced concrete covered with stucco, red tile roofs, and other features such as arcades. The design elements combine to create a Spanish Eclectic style unique to Hamilton Field.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The complex is in a deteriorated condition and has been vandalized, but it still retains its original mass, shape, and design elements.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** Building 437 has an irregular, basically T-shape, plan with a central atrium. It is one-story high and measures 130 feet by 96 feet. The front elevation consists of two wings, separated by a covered walkway or porch supported by six-inch square posts. Two extensions with flat roofs have been added to the north and south elevations. The 1960 addition on the northwest is 34 feet by 47 feet.

2. **Foundation:** The foundation is reinforced concrete and sits on compacted precast concrete piles and girders.

3. **Walls:** The walls of the original portion of the building consist of eight-inch thick of poured-in-place concrete coated with cementitious stucco rendered with a smooth face. Exterior detailing is minimal, consisting of concrete and stucco pilasters on either side of the main doorways. The addition to the north elevation is constructed of wood frame covered with stucco.

4. **Structural systems, framing:** Structural support is provided by reinforced concrete columns and an infill system with a rafter and truss roof.

5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:** The primary entrance is accessed through a covered walkway which surrounds the atrium. It is supported by concrete pilasters against the two wings of the building and four pairs of wooden posts with Mission-style brackets supporting the covered walkway. Two sets of wide, low brick

steps separated by a landing provide access to the atrium from the front facade sidewalk. Side access is provided by stairs leading from sidewalks through the arched opening to the covered walkways. These stairs have concrete risers and brick treads. Two-inch double pipe balustrades are attached to the exterior wall and staircase. Concrete steps and a concrete stoop with pipe railing access the rear of the building. Two flights of wooden steps on either end of a wood loading dock also access the rear facade.

6. Chimneys: Terra cotta pipe and metal ventilators are located on the roof.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways/doors: Metal and glass doors with Art Deco detailing open onto the walkway. Two archways provide entry to the rear of the atrium from the north and south sides; the arch on the south side has been blocked over. Another doorway, which provided access to the south wing, has been covered over on the exterior but is visible from the interior. It is wood with nine recessed panels in a geometric design. Other doorways include a solid-core pedestrian door on a concrete loading platform. Two vertical tongue and groove pedestrian doors on the rear of the building accessed by a wooden loading platform, and a solid-core pedestrian door with two recessed panels in the rear.

b. Windows/shutters: Two glass and metal display windows are located on the southwest front and rear walls of the building and are visible from the atrium. The original windows on the building's exterior consist of three-light wood frame casements with a four-light transom in the 1942 portion of the building and 10-over 10-light sash windows in the northern addition. There are six sets of three casement windows on the rear wall and two sets on the south elevation.

8. Roof:

a. Shape/covering: The roof is hipped and gabled, with five main sections connected by the low-pitched gable roof of the central walkway. The roofs are covered with terra cotta mission tile, except for the addition which has a composition roof. The tile portions have terra cotta Mission tile ridge lines.

b. Cornice/eaves: The gutter system consists of metal gutters and downspouts with concrete splash blocks.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

a. First Floor: Main entrances are from the atrium into the north wing and the east rear portions of the building. Originally the building consisted of an open

floorplan. Modern additions include temporary plywood partitions in the south wing and the addition to the north elevation, which contains a kitchen and cafeteria. In the 1940s the PX was divided into different functional areas and had a general store, restaurant, kitchen, storage rooms, heater room, transformer room, offices for the PX officer, book keeper and cashier, a tailor shop, grocery store, bathrooms, and supply rooms. By 1958 the PX also contained two barber shops (officers' and enlisted men), women's and men's clothing store, and a watch repair shop (Hamilton Army Air Field n.d.).

2. **Flooring:** The subflooring for the building is concrete and covered with various types of asphalt tile and linoleum. Flooring consists of eight-inch square brown and beige confetti patterned vinyl asphalt tile, red and white marbled asphalt tile in the center south wing, green asphalt tile in the rear portion, and confetti-patterned linoleum in the latrine.
3. **Wall/ceiling finish:** Walls and ceilings in most areas of the building are of gypsum board or plaster, while the walls in the latrine have been covered with modern composition wallboard. The ceiling in the rear portion of the building has been lowered and is covered with acoustical tile, other ceilings are fiberboard or gypsum board. Temporary plywood partitions have been installed in the south wing.
4. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways/doors:** Original interior doors are solid-core wood with three recessed horizontal panels beneath four lights.
 - b. **Windows:** Original windows are eight and 15-light obscure wire windows.
5. **Decorative features/trim:** The display window on the southeast front of the atrium has cove molding beneath decorative tile trim. It is supported by three mission-style brackets beneath a decorative beam. Slatted wooden benches placed between the atrium wood posts create a courtyard seating area.
6. **Hardware:** Hardware on the exterior metal and glass doors consists of metal thumb latch locks with interior panic bars. Original locksets on the interior doors consist of standard circular knob with rectangular plate opened with a skeleton key. Replacement locksets are of the modern Schlage type.
7. **Mechanical equipment:**
 - a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** The heating system is through ducts, vented in the roof. Circular pumps and exhaust fans are in the heating

room. The building was heated by three 39,000 BTU, five 31,400 BTU, and two 137,000 BTU heaters and six connectors.

b. Kitchen appliances: Kitchen appliances included a dishwasher, mixers, range, ovens, and fryers. All have been removed.

c. Ventilation: The roof is ventilated by terra cotta pipe and metal ventilators. Cast concrete grilles in a decorative geometric pattern vent the crawl space and provide a decorative element to the exterior walls. Small square doors also vent the crawl space. Loading docks were lit with wall-mounted flood lights over pedestrian doors.

d. Lighting: The original lighting fixtures are of the "schoolhouse" type with metal canopies and tubes with a milk glass bowl. Replacement fixtures include suspended two-tube fluorescent fixtures and two-tube fluorescent fixtures with shallow plastic diffusing panels mounted on the ceiling. Wall-mounted lanterns, some with patterned glass, are mounted adjacent to the doors on exterior walls.

e. Plumbing: The latrines contain original "Standard" sinks and flush valve toilets; the stalls are a modern addition.

D. Site:

1. General site orientation: The primary facade of the Post Exchange faces southwest toward Escolta Avenue and spans the area between 5th and 6th Streets. The building is located in the original Spanish Colonial Revival district of Hamilton Army Air Field on a flat site that is surrounded by rolling hills, fitting within a grid system adjacent to the flight field. A large asphalted parking lot is located to the rear of the building.

2. Historic landscape design: Captain Nurse's overall plan for base design include thoughtful use of rock walls, terracing, and plantings to create a visual effect that was continued, in a more limited fashion, during World War II.

The majority of buildings in the administration area have some landscaping, particularly around the NCO barracks. Street trees, such as Modesto ash, camphor, and various palms, are present throughout this area. Building corner and doorways are delimited by a number of conifers, the most prominent being sawara false cypress and Italian cypress. Accent trees include coast redwood and some red ironbark, which were incorporated into divider triangles and sometimes near entrances. California and Mexican fan palms and golden bamboo were prominent framers of entrances, as was the New Zealand dracaena. Foundation plantings are quite diverse and include mock orange, flowering quince, Portugal laurel, and Manukka tea tree. Japanese privet, Hollywood

juniper, and heavenly bamboo appear to have been added subsequent to the late 1930s and were not part of the original landscape design on base.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398). Original pencil on vellum plans for the PX and subsequent improvements are on file at the National Archives, Pacific Division, San Bruno, CA. and the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

B. Historic Maps and Views:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

C. Interviews:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

D. Bibliography:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

Sources cited in this individual report are listed below.

Fine, Jesse, and Lenore Remington

1972 *Army Corps of Engineers: Construction in the U.S.* U.S. Army and World War II, Office of Military History.

Hamilton Facility Cards

1933-1971 Maintenance Cards for Base Facilities. On file, Hamilton Army Air Field Installation Office, Novato, and Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

Maniery, Mary L., Leslie R. Fryman, and Fred Hrusa

1993 *National Register of Historic Places Evaluation, Hamilton Army Air Field Historic District, Marin County, California.* Submitted to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District.

Thomason and Associates

1993 *Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas*. Cultural Resource Survey, Final Report. Nashville, Tennessee. On file, State Office of Historic Preservation, Austin, Texas.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

F. Supplemental Material:

Representative floor plans of the building(s) are attached. These were drafted on site in 1994 by Keith Syda, scanned into a computer and drawn by Christopher MacDonald in 1995, and corrected and finalized by Claire Warshaw in 1996 (all PAR Environmental Services, Inc. staff).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Hamilton Army Air Field is owned by various federal entities including the Department of the Navy, Department of the Army, United States Coast Guard, and General Services Administration. The Army/GSA parcels are being excessed and sold to private developers. The Navy property is included in Base Closure and Realignment actions.

As part of the Army's undertaking, it has been determined in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) that the excess sale will have an affect on properties at the air field, and that these properties are components of a district that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Based on consultation with the OHP and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to 36 CFR part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was entered into by the interested parties in March 1994. The agreement stipulated that prior to excess sale the Army must contact the HABS/HAER division at the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service, San Francisco, California, to determine the appropriate level and kind of recordation for the subject properties. The MOA further stipulated that copies of the documentation be made available to the OHP and appropriate local archives designated by the OHP. This recordation has been prepared in order to meet those stipulations.

The title page, Part I, and Part III were prepared by Mary L. Maniery, Historian, PAR Environmental Services, Sacramento. Architectural descriptions in Part II were compiled by Judith Marvin, Historian/Architectural Historian, Foothill Resources, Murphys, California. Descriptions were checked against photographs and plans by Mary L. Maniery and were

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embellished and corrected, as necessary. Information on historic landscape design was extracted by Mary L. Maniery from a report prepared by Dr. Fred Hrusa, Botanist, PAR Environmental Services. Photography was prepared by David DeVries, Mesa Technical, Berkeley, California.

